



THE DARK AGES ON THE BLACK SEA?

MANUSCRIPT PAINTING OF HAMSHEN

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In the scholarship on Armenian manuscript painting, certain traditions are typically celebrated as cultural high points: for example, Bagratuni (Bagratid) illumination of the tenth and eleventh centuries in Greater Armenia and particularly thirteenth- and fourteenth-century manuscripts of the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia. In contrast, it is striking to consider the reception of the manuscript illumination of Hamshen, an Armenian enclave on the Black Sea coast. Few scholars mention the area, and its manuscript art has been hitherto neglected.¹ Admittedly, the area did not produce the kind of sumptuous codices for which the Bagratuni and Cilician traditions are famous; yet it was home to a lively community of scribes and artists, whose manuscripts are today housed in the Matenadaran in Erevan,² the British Library, the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem,³ the Mekhitarist monastery in Vienna,

¹ An earlier version of this paper is published in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin: History, Society and Identity in the Highlands of Northeast Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 42-51. The most up-to-date study of the topography, archaeology, and history of the area is Robert Edwards, "Hamšen: An Armenian Enclave in the Byzanto-Georgian Pontos: A Survey of Literary and Non-Literary Sources," *Le Muséon*, 101 (1988): 403-42. See also his earlier studies on the fortification architecture of the Pontos: "The Fortress of Şebinkarahisar (Koloneia)," *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina* 32 (1985): 23-64, and "The Garrison Forts of the Pontos: A Case for the Diffusion of the Armenian Paradigm," *Revue des études arméniennes*, n.s., 19 (1985): 181-284. For a critical review of Edwards' works on fortification architecture, see Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation* (Louvain: Peeters, 2001).

² Among the Hamshen manuscripts in the Matenadaran are Ms 7056, which was copied in 1506 by Hayrapet, "a religious man from *Hamamashen*" (Edwards, "Hamšen," p. 410), and Ms 218, dated to 1240 (Edwards, p. 408).

³ Among these is a collection of the writings of Grigor Tatevatsi, produced at the Monastery of Koshtents, catalogued as Ms 1617. See N. Bogharyan [Norayr Poghar-

and the Philadelphia Free Library. Furthermore, the Hamshen manuscripts were produced during the sixteenth century, a period in which book production declined sharply in Greater Armenia. Hence, the codices present a challenge, if modest, to the theory of a "Dark Age" in medieval Armenian manuscript illumination.

This essay explores a sample of Hamshen manuscript illumination and attempts to locate it within the broader context of Armenian illumination, as well as to determine whether a specific Hamshen style of painting can be identified—a reasonable supposition given the geographical insularity of the region. Such endeavors are difficult, however, because of the small number of illustrated manuscripts that survive and the paucity of their imagery. Furthermore, most of the extant manuscripts are difficult to access, and even of those that are published, their illustrations typically are neither described nor reproduced. The work of Robert Edwards and a few library and exhibit catalogues constitute the sum of the literature.

Edwards has rightly noted that evidence for a rich manuscript tradition in Hamshen extends from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century. In 1240, a certain scribe Stepanos, who was born and possibly trained in Hamshen, copied manuscripts in Rome while in residence with the Armenian community there.⁴ Further testimony to scribal activity appears with a miscellany dated to the fifteenth century, of which the first part was produced in 1422 at the Koshtents monastery of Hamshen.⁵ In 1499, a certain Karapet reportedly copied a book on medicine in the region of Hamshen at the village of Eghnovit. From the following century, an anthology of the poetical works of Nerses Shnorhali survives, as well as texts by other authors such as Grigor Tatevatsi.⁶ Scribal activity continued into the seventeenth century and also attracted distant clerics to the district, as in 1637 when a certain Karapet Jughayetsi came to Hamshen for the purpose of copying The Book of Psalms.⁷

The variety of texts is significant. Ranging from service books to poetical and scientific works, the surviving manuscripts demonstrate

ian] *Mayr tsutsak dzeragrats Srbots Hakobiants* [Grand Catalogue of Manuscripts of Saint James] (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1971), vol. 5, pp. 417-18.

⁴ Edwards, "Hamshen," p. 408.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 409. See also note 2 above.

⁶ The work of Nerses Shnorhali is preserved in the Philadelphia Ms 123, and that of Grigor Tatevatsi appears in Jerusalem Ms 1917 and Vienna Ms 119.

⁷ See Edwards, "Hamshen," p. 413 and note 36. This Psalter was also illustrated.

that, despite its isolated location, Hamshen hosted an intellectual and scientific center of some significance. The excellence of its scriptoria and libraries is further attested by the visit of Karapet Jughayetsi, among others. The mobility of local scribes is also noteworthy; in addition to the work of Hamshen Armenians in Rome, a number of colophons identify scribes with the surname Hamshentsi, leading Edwards to the conclusion that "the clerics of Hamshen not only had well-established traditions by religious training and scribal production at home, but their scholars were respected abroad."⁸

Frederick Lewis Oriental Ms 123

The first manuscript to be considered is located in the Philadelphia Free Library.⁹ A copy of the poetical works of Nerses Shnorhali and other writers, it was produced, according to the colophon, at the churches of Surb Astvatsatsin and Surb Sion, "in the monastery where the relics of the father St. Khatchik and St. Vardan . . . have been placed for the glory and protection of our *gawar* of Hamshen."¹⁰ The colophon also offers other valuable details. Relating that the codex was completed June 9, 1528, the colophon gives a number of significant historical synchronisms: the production of the manuscript took place during the sultanate of Suleiman I (1520-66) and during the reign of Skandar Pasha in Trebizond (Trabzon), "when our fortresses were controlled by the Aghas, Darshevali and Siminaws."¹¹ The name of the illuminator is not mentioned; however, the scribes are identified as Priest Karapet, Karapet the Younger, and Vahram.

In general, the manuscript is in a good state of preservation. The 256 folios are made of vellum (rather than paper, as was also used by this time) and are fairly large.¹² Neat lines of *bolorgir* (miniscule) script are arranged in single columns on the page, and the folios, punc-

⁸ Ibid, p. 411.

⁹ This codex is published in Avedis K. Sanjian, *A Catalogue of Medieval Armenian Manuscripts in the United States* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), p. 675. More up-to-date commentary and bibliography appear in *Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Illuminated Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1994), pp. 198-99 (cat. no. 72).

¹⁰ Edwards, "Hamshen," p. 412.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 413.

¹² The folios are 14.7 by 10.7 centimeters (5.8 x 4.2 inches).

tured with V-shaped notches at the spine, are fastened to the binding with knotted cord, and the top of the spine features a raised end-band of multicolored silk thread (Fig. 1). The text block is bound with traditional Armenian leather covers, which appear to be original.¹³ The design of the binding is particularly striking: decorated with blind tooling of guilloche and interlace patterns, the front and back covers feature two varieties of interlaced rectangle designs (Figs. 2 and 3). The characteristic fore-edge flap is also blind-tooled with an interlaced rectangle, framed by a border of punches, florets, and a concentric almond-shaped stamp (Fig. 4). Sylvie Merian has pointed out that there is evidence for the traditional leather strap fastenings.¹⁴

The ornamentation, which occurs at intervals throughout the text, is also typical of Armenian manuscript illumination, featuring decorated incipit letters, marginal arabesques, and headpieces. Light blues and pinks predominate, but their lack of intensity is most likely the product of fading. The artist has also made use of the neutral color of the background vellum in building the design; the arabesque on folio 61 (Fig. 5), for example, is defined through narrow outlines, rather than positive forms. The result is not a carpet of decoration, but rather, delicate, interlocking bands woven through empty spaces.

The headpieces that crown the text most often feature stylized plant forms, or palmettes. On folio 107, such forms are framed by half palmettes. At the base of the motif, the stem bifurcates and weaves together into an intricate band, which divides and frames the vegetal forms in box-shaped frames. The background color is blue, while the palmettes themselves are accented with rose at the base of their leaves. The decorated incipit letters (starting the page), like the headpiece, are also typical of medieval Armenian painting. In the *nomina sacra* of Christ, each letter is divided into zones which alternate between rose and blue, and bear a foliate motif at their terminations. The marginal ornament at the right of the text is also of the characteristic arabesque type, in which pointed floral forms undulate gracefully in and out of knots, creating a series of loops that end in pointed leaves.¹⁵

Another kind of headpiece design appears on folio 61r (Fig. 5). Again rectangular, the outline is filled with a succession of stylized

¹³ The boards are arranged, as is usual for Armenian manuscripts, with the wood-grain running horizontally, rather than vertically as in other cultures. For further discussion, see Mathews and Wieck, *Treasures in Heaven*, pp. 130-34.

¹⁴ Mathews and Wieck, *Treasures in Heaven*, p. 199.

¹⁵ The marginal ornament is almost identical to that of folio 7.

acanthus leaves, oriented alternately up and down, and the spaces between them are filled with softly curving leaves. On this page, the decorated initial is figural, consisting of a bird-like creature with a long, thin, knotted neck and a protruding tongue. More striking decorations in the same vein occur on folio 107v (Fig. 6), where the capitalized letter Պ (P) has been conceived as a pair of birds, ornamented with multicolored horizontal strips. One longer, larger bird, again with a knotted neck creates the curved portion of the letter, while a smaller, standing bird forms the central upright and appears to be piercing the stomach of its partner. Next to the letter is an unusual flourish in the margin. Unlike the standard arabesque ornamentation, this form resembles a bow and arrow, which gradually narrows into an elegant line with spiral terminations. The central leaves are also adorned with small circular forms, possibly a reference to berries. Both the letter and the marginal ornament of this folio employ an unusual color scheme; the forms are painted in deep navy blue and a light green, rather than rose and light blue. Despite this discrepancy, the motifs display the same interest in linear design and multicolored patterns evident in the other ornaments of the manuscript.

Vienna, Mekhitarist Monastery Ms 119

Two additional illustrated manuscripts from Hamshen are located in the Mekhitarist Library in Vienna,¹⁶ of which the first to be discussed is a collection of the writings of Grigor Tatevatsi. The manuscript is large, measuring 18 by 13 centimeters on its exterior, and is written in *bolorgir* of medium size.¹⁷ The binding consists of wooden boards covered with ornamented leather,¹⁸ and the present state of the manuscript is poor.¹⁹ The colophon, which lacks information regarding the date, location, and scribes of the manuscript, remembers “the brave

¹⁶ The two manuscripts from Hamshen to be discussed below are housed in the Vienna Mekhitarist monastery, catalogued as Ms 119 and Ms 431, and published in Hakob Tashian [Hakovbos/Jacobus Dashian], *Tsutsak hayeren dzeragrats/Catalog der Armenischen Handschriften* (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1891), pp. 400-02 and 882-83, respectively.

¹⁷ The manuscript contains 163 folios.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, this author was not able to view the Vienna manuscripts and hence is unable to comment on issues of codicological construction.

¹⁹ Almost every page, according to Tashian, shows signs of wear, age, and restoration.

hretor [orator] of Hamshen, and also excellent *vartabed*²⁰ who was knowledgeable and always prepared to answer scriptural or theological questions.²⁰ Although no date is provided, the codex most likely dates between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

While full-page images are absent, as with the previous example, most of the chapter headings feature headpieces, and many pages bear marginal ornaments. Folios 14v-15 (Fig. 7) provide a representative example of the page layout of text and image. The typical arabesque-style ornament is somewhat smaller here than in the Philadelphia manuscript. The marginalia of the Vienna manuscript, however, is striking for its variety; on folio 15 is the first and most standard arabesque type, with pointed leaf terminations; however, a number of interesting variations occur, as on folio 39, where a bird appears in the margin, standing on a decorative leaf and biting a tendril (Fig. 8), and on folio 45, in which the artist has broadened the base of the arabesque form, creating a triangular effect highlighted with a wash of light blue (Fig. 9).

The most elaborate decoration of the manuscript occurs on folio 5 (Fig. 10). The page is dominated by a detailed arched headpiece, which features a series of vine-scroll rinceaux of rose and white, backed in light blue. The profile of the interior "arch" of the headpiece is particularly notable, bearing a complex profile of lobes and, near to the base, pointed horizontal cutouts. Such elaboration on the arched design of the headpiece can be found beginning in the thirteenth century onward in both Cilicia and Greater Armenia, and has been connected, as Priscilla Soucek has discussed, to Islamic and Mongol art.²¹ In the fifteenth-century manuscript of Boladzor, also in Vienna and dated 1484,²² there is the same interest in elaborating on the headpiece with the creation of pointed segments.²³

²⁰ See Edwards, "Hamšen," p. 411; Tashian, *Tsutsak hayeren dzeragrats*, p. 402.

²¹ See Priscilla Soucek, "Armenian and Islamic Manuscript Painting: A Visual Dialogue," *Treasures in Heaven: Armenian Art, Religion, and Society*, ed. Thomas F. Mathews and Roger S. Wieck (New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1998). Soucek notes the profiled niche head in the Cilician Gospel of Marshal Oshin, dated to 1274, and connects it to Islamic tomb portals and ceramics. Her argument is interesting in the context considered here, although one cannot rule out that such lobed forms could have also reached Cilicia from the West. The predominance of the pointed trefoil in both Cilician painting and in the Gothic style raises this question.

²² Ms 403.

²³ See Heidi and Helmut Buschhausen, *Die illuminierten armenischen Handschriften der Mechitaristen-Congregation in Wien* (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1976),

Vienna, Mekhitarist Monastery Ms 431

Another manuscript from Hamshen contains a collection of apotropaic (warding off of evil) prayers, some of them authored by Cyprian, the fifth-century bishop of Carthage. The colophon, which refers to the codex as a medical prayer book, states that the text was written in 1517, "under the sign of the ram, May 12, from a good and worthy copy, by the hands of the worthless Hovannes Malghi, in the land of Hamshen at the monastery of Surb Khatchik, the spiritual overseer of the monasteries of Surb Astvatsatsin and Surb Vartanants, at the behest of the deacon Stepanos, for the enjoyment of him, and in memory of himself and his parents Davit and Eghisabet." Now in poor condition, the manuscript is quite small, measuring only 9 by 6.5 centimeters (3.55 x 2.55 inches) in its exterior proportions. With its diminutive size, the manuscript would have been particularly appropriate for the frequent travels of the professional of Hamshen, and it is particularly tempting to imagine that it accompanied a local cleric on house visits. Several of the folios contain marginal ornaments and headpieces of the standard type. The chapter heading on folio 67 (Fig. 11) features three standing palmettes which bear a resemblance to the headpiece of the Philadelphia manuscript (Fig. 6). Most interesting, however, is a motif occurring on folio 82, featuring a long-necked bird which forms the Armenian letter Հ (Ho) (Fig. 12). Its lower body faces to the left, while its long neck twists to the right, forming the upper diagonal of the letter.

British Library Ms Or. 6555

Another manuscript connected to the region of Hamshen presents more striking marginalia, in this case involving figural scenes.²⁴ A menologium (collection of lives of the saints arranged according to the calendar), the codex, housed today in the British Library, measures externally 15 by 10.5 inches (38 by 26.7 centimeters). The colophon relates that it was completed in 1488, at the request of the "divinely honored and gentle Nerses the priest . . . in memory of himself and his parents, and his wife Eranuhi, and of his issue by her, Step'anos the priest."²⁵

plate 65, Fig. 188. An abridged English translation was published in 1977.

²⁴ Frederick C. Conybeare, *A Catalogue of the Armenian Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Longman's, 1913), pp. 165-67.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

The colophon also indicates those involved with preparation of the manuscript. A certain Nerses Malaz smoothed the vellum²⁶ and helped in copying of the text, but the majority of writing was undertaken by the “sin-stained and unintelligent” monk Movses. An illustrator is not mentioned, and presumably in this case, as with other manuscripts with less ambitious pictorial cycles, the scribe also painted the images.

Movses is of the district of Hamshen, and the manuscript was produced in “the canton of Khakhtik’, which is now called Babert’, in the monastery called Bertak.”²⁷ A town in the vicinity of Erzerum, Baberd (Baiburt) lies outside the district of Hamshen, but the two areas seemed to have enjoyed frequent relations, particularly in the domain of book production.²⁸ It is unfortunate that the place of Movses’ training was not mentioned in the colophon. However, considering the apparently high reputation of the scriptoria of Hamshen in the late medieval era, it is quite likely that he received his scribal training in the area of his birthplace.

The manuscript’s margins are copiously illustrated with vegetal and figural ornament. Appearing either singly or in groups, the figures possess regular proportions, if sometimes rather elongated limbs. Often bearded, the faces are represented in outline, and the eyes are particularly notable, for at their outer corner the bottom and top lids join in a single line extending outward. This feature is commonly found in fifteenth-century manuscript painting in Greater Armenia, occurring both in Vaspurakan and in the north, as in a manuscript produced in Erzinka (Erzinjan) in 1449, now located in the library of Princeton University.²⁹ The main color scheme consists of red, orange, and several tones of blue, including silver blue, light blue, and navy.

The marginalia often consist of narrative scenes, and a few representative examples have been chosen here for description. The first

²⁶ This was presumably done with a pumice stone. See Syvlie L Merian and Mary V. Orna, “The Making of an Armenian Manuscript,” in Mathews and Wieck, *Treasures in Heaven* (1994), pp. 125-26.

²⁷ Conybeare, *Catalogue*, p. 166. The colophon also mentions a certain Melik, the steward, and his daughter Emin, “who took great pains to minister to us while we were writing this book.”

²⁸ For example, Edwards relates that in 1637, a certain Ter Hakob Hamshentsi purchased a manuscript from Baberd and probably brought it with him to Hamshen. See Edwards, “Hamshen,” p. 413, and “Šebinkarahisar,” p. 39.

²⁹ Garret Ms 18. For a representative illustration, see folio 15v, the dedication page of the manuscript, reproduced in Mathews and Wieck, *Treasures in Heaven* (1994), plate 28.

figural scenes occur on folio 41v (Fig. 13), in which is seen the standing figure of Gregory the Illuminator (Grigor Lusavorich). The bearded saint glances and gestures to the text at right and wears a pointed hood. He is dressed in a voluminous episcopal robe of red, hemmed in blue and decorated with blue crosses at the breast. Certain features of the costume deserve special note: instead of the usual open, skirted toga typical of earlier medieval images of saints, Gregory wears red trousers, and traditional sandals are replaced with pointed boots. Similar iconography can be found in contemporary Armenian manuscript illumination of the Lake Van area and suggests contact—if only indirect—with Islamic and Mongol visual culture. The same style of costume, with trousers and pointed boots, appears, for example, in the Gospels of Khachatur Khizantsi of 1455.³⁰

The treatment of the drapery allows only a vague sense of the body underneath. Gregory's right elbow can be discerned among the folds at left, and the artist has carefully observed the gatherings of drapery at his wrist, from where the cloth cascades down in a series of rhythmic curves. These curves, as well as the drapery on his left side, completely obscure the figure down to the lower legs. The abstraction of drapery into linear patterns is also evident in the presence of diagonal strokes at the hem of the cloak and trousers.

On folio 195v (Fig. 14), another protagonist of the conversion story appears: the pagan king Trdat (Tiridates) III. It is particularly interesting to note how a fifteenth-century Armenian envisioned the fourth-century ruler. Large-headed and stocky in figure, Trdat wears a nimbus and crown, the familiar pointed boots, and an elaborate cloak which falls in complex folds over his left arm. He holds a cross in his left hand, on which he also wears a large ring, and in the right hand he carries a long staff, whose top takes the form of the head of a bridled donkey or horse. Unlike Gregory, Trdat appears with a mustache and curled shoulder-length hair.

One of the most interesting scenes occurs on folio 231r (Fig. 15) depicting the vision of Gregory. According to the *History of the Armenians* by Agathangelos, the pagan Trdat cast Gregory into a deep pit, where he experienced a heavenly vision.³¹ Located at the bottom of the

³⁰ Examples may be found in the scene of the Raising of Lazarus or the Marriage at Cana. Illustrations of these images are reproduced in Sirarpie Der Nersessian, *Armenian Manuscripts in the Walters Art Gallery* (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1973).

³¹ Robert W. Thomson, trans. and comm., *Agathangelos: History of the Armeni-*

page, the composition features Gregory, seated in three-quarter's position on a curvilinear, amorphous form which is undoubtedly meant to represent his rocky prison. With closed eyes and hunched shoulders, Gregory leans forward, head in hand, lost in his dream. An angel, depicted only in half-length, descends towards him holding a scroll. His wings are particularly striking, decorated with pink tips and horizontal blue lines. Gregory's form is also noteworthy. Although shown in three-quarters view, he is depicted with only one arm and leg (and it is the left leg, rather than the right, that is shown). This indifference to anatomy is, once again, a typical feature of late medieval Armenian manuscript illumination, as in the Khizan Gospels of 1455 and the Vaspurakan Gospels of 1457.³² No shading models the figures, who are articulated principally through line. As in the earlier figure of Trdat, the artist reveals here a greater interest in patterns of drapery than in the figure itself.

Gregory reappears on folio 242v (Fig. 16), here in conversation with an angel. Although again in clerical costume, Gregory is now barefoot. The most drastic change involves his proportions, however, which have become extremely elongated; the saint occupies more than half of the length of text column. The artist, however, has not chosen to lengthen Gregory's arms, and thus his elbows reach only to chest level. His visible hand again reveals a lack of interest in anatomy: not only is it unnaturally large with attenuated fingers, it also appears to be a left hand, although attached to his right arm.³³ Gregory gestures to the angel depicted at right, who appears only in bust form³⁴ and is actually

ans (Albany: New York: State University of New York Press, 1976).

³² See, for example, the figure of Christ in the Baptism scene of a Van Gospels, now in the Manoogian Museum in Southfield, Michigan, reproduced in Mathews and Wieck, *Treasures in Heaven* (1994), plate 27.

³³ One must wonder here whether it is fair to impose such preconceptions on the images. Speaking broadly, the representation of correct and lifelike proportions was of course not often the main goal of medieval art. Yet, there is a difference between the abstraction of the human figure, so common to the tradition, and what appears to be very pronounced anatomical distortions. Along with the reversed hands of Gregory, one may also note the figures of John and Prochoros in the Gospels of 1211 (Matenadaran Ms 4823) by Princess Vaneni, in which one witnesses not only a "naïve" canon of the figure, but also what seems to be a very deliberate alteration to it, namely, the placement of both ears on the right side of the figures' heads! As with the manuscript of 1211, it would be difficult to attribute Gregory's reversed hands simply to the lack of training, and hence one wonders whether such changes held some special significance.

³⁴ The image is smudged in this area.

positioned within the column of text next to the uncial letter of the new chapter. The placement of the images is noteworthy, as it calls attention to the relationship between the margins and the text.

Folio 441 (Fig. 17) presents a different kind of marginal image. It illustrates a reading for the fifteenth of March, featuring a scene of the prophet Daniel, Anania, Misayel, and Azarya (of which the latter three were renamed as the famous Shadrach, Mishach, and Abednego).³⁵ The four young men kneel within a lobed frame, wearing draperies of red and blue. While the two central figures are obscured for the most part, the flanking figures are in full view. They wear tunics, and the excess drapery has been drawn up to expose the lower legs. This is particularly evident in the leftmost figure, who sits with his right leg folded beneath him and his left leg bent upright before him. At the far right, the figure holds his leg bent in front of him, and, in a naturalistic movement, grasps it with his hand.

The single headpiece that adorns the manuscript is located on folio 288 (Fig. 18). Large and richly ornamented, it is rectangular in form, featuring a central lobed, profiled arch, filled with decorative motifs. They consist of a repeating interlaced floral design, in which the forms are united to each other by the interweaving of leaves and stems. In its general design and the use of shading at the base of the flowers, the headpiece finds similarities with that of the Philadelphia manuscript, as with many others of fifteenth century Armenia. Above the headpiece, two birds confront a central vessel, although both, interestingly, glance to the right. A marginal ornament appears to the right of the headpiece, composed of a floral motif. Below, the first line of text consists of large decorated uncials, featuring a typically compartmentalized design of alternating red, blue, and white bands.³⁶ As with the Philadelphia manuscript, red, spiky lines emanate from the central motifs, perhaps meant to indicate the sections of leaves.

Conclusion

The manuscripts produced by the scribes of Hamshen testify to a lively artistic tradition, evident in the marginalia and ornamental decorations. The complex interlace designs of the arabesques and chapter headings can be compared with fifteenth-century examples from Greater Arme-

³⁵ From *The Book of Daniel*, 1:6.

³⁶ They are non-figural, but at the same time have an almost bird-like appearance.

nia, as can the faces and figures of the British Library manuscript. The leather binding of the Philadelphia manuscript, with its intricate patterns, is also suggestive of a developed tradition of book production in the area. Such evidence for artistic contact is all the more noteworthy when one considers the state of manuscript painting in Greater Armenia in the same era.

With the increase in Ottoman power by the sixteenth century, the internal feudal system of Armenia had virtually disappeared, and many Armenians left their homelands for the imperial capital of Constantinople. As a result of this pattern of migration, the Armenian population in Trebizond dropped by 50 percent.³⁷ The Ottoman-Safavid wars of this era also wreaked havoc; in 1523, Erzerum, one of the Ottoman army's staging points for attack, stood empty and in ruins. The political and economic decline of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire had deleterious consequences for artistic and architectural production. Regarding monastic complexes, little is known of construction other than repairs during this period. Manuscript illumination met a similar fate; far fewer manuscripts survive from the sixteenth than from the fifteenth century, and almost no manuscripts were known from the 1520s to the early 1540s.³⁸ At this very time, however, the region of Hamshen, protected by a natural line of fortifications, continued to enjoy relative political autonomy and an enduring tradition of manuscript production. The painting in the region thus testifies to the survival of the arts of the book during one of the darkest periods in the history of medieval Armenia.

³⁷ Dickran Kouymjian, "Armenia from the Fall of the Cilician Kingdom (1375) to the Forced Emigration under Shah Abbas (1604)," in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, 2 vols. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), vol. 1, pp. 28-29.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 43.

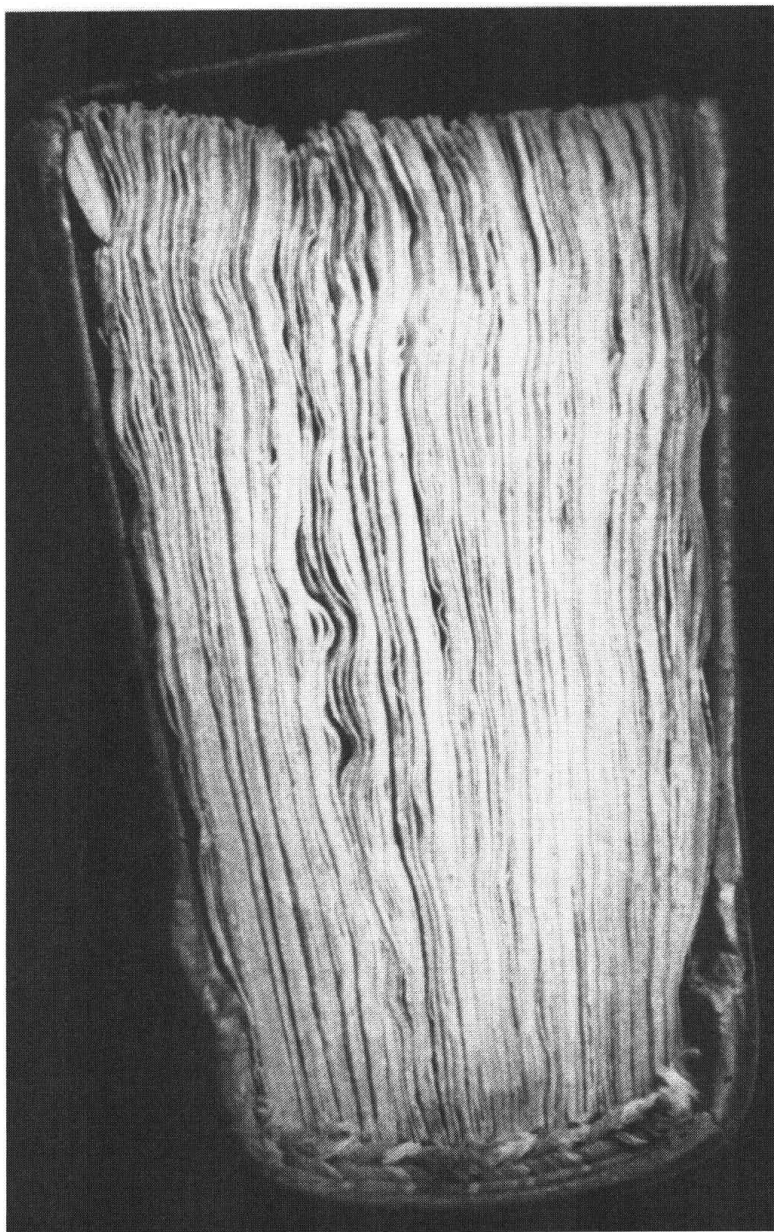


Fig. 1. Raised End-Band, Frederick Lewis Oriental Ms 123,
Philadelphia Free Library

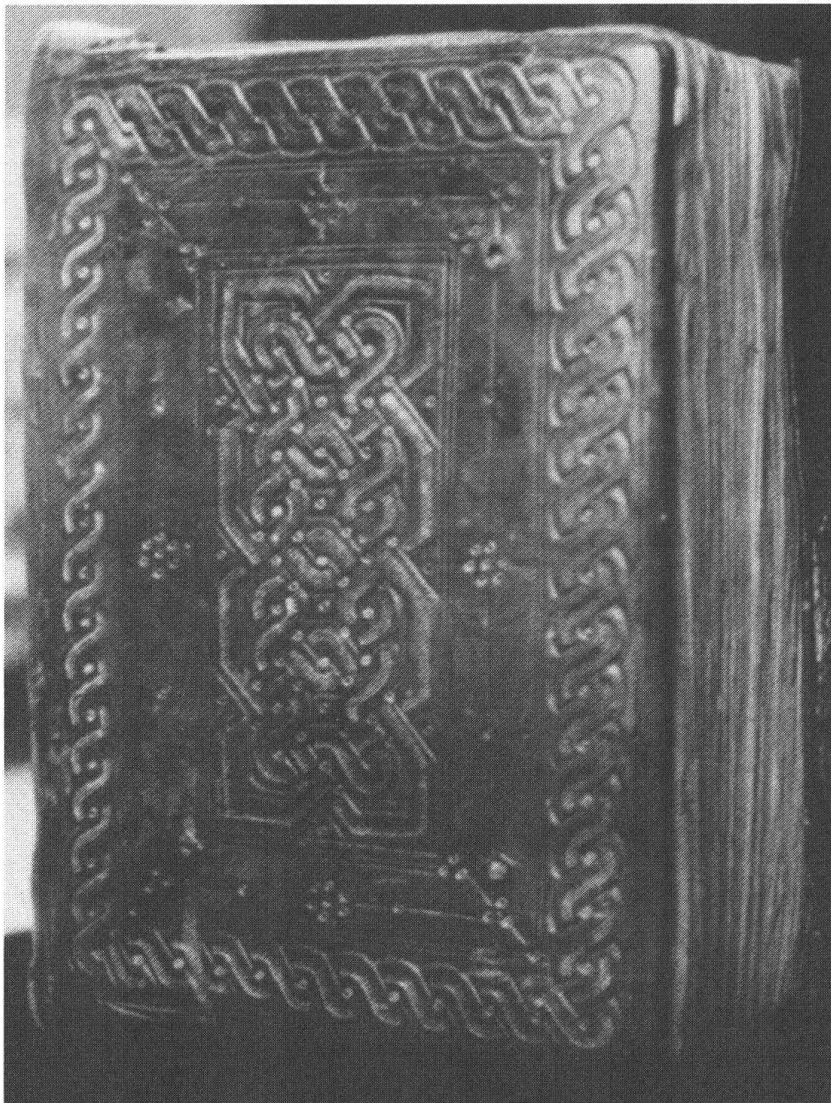


Fig. 2. Front Binding, Ms 123



Fig. 3. Back Binding, Ms 123

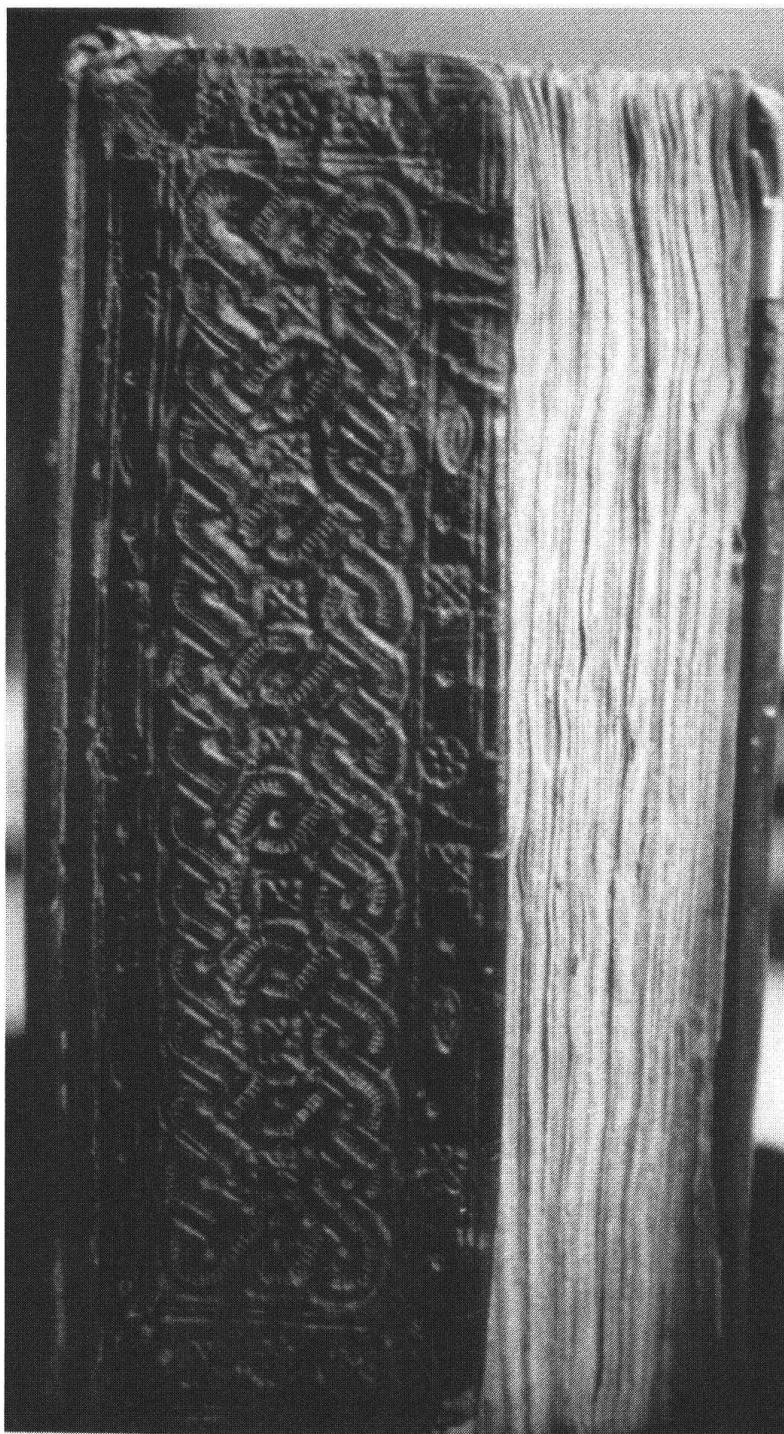


Fig. 4. Fore-Edge Flap, Ms 123

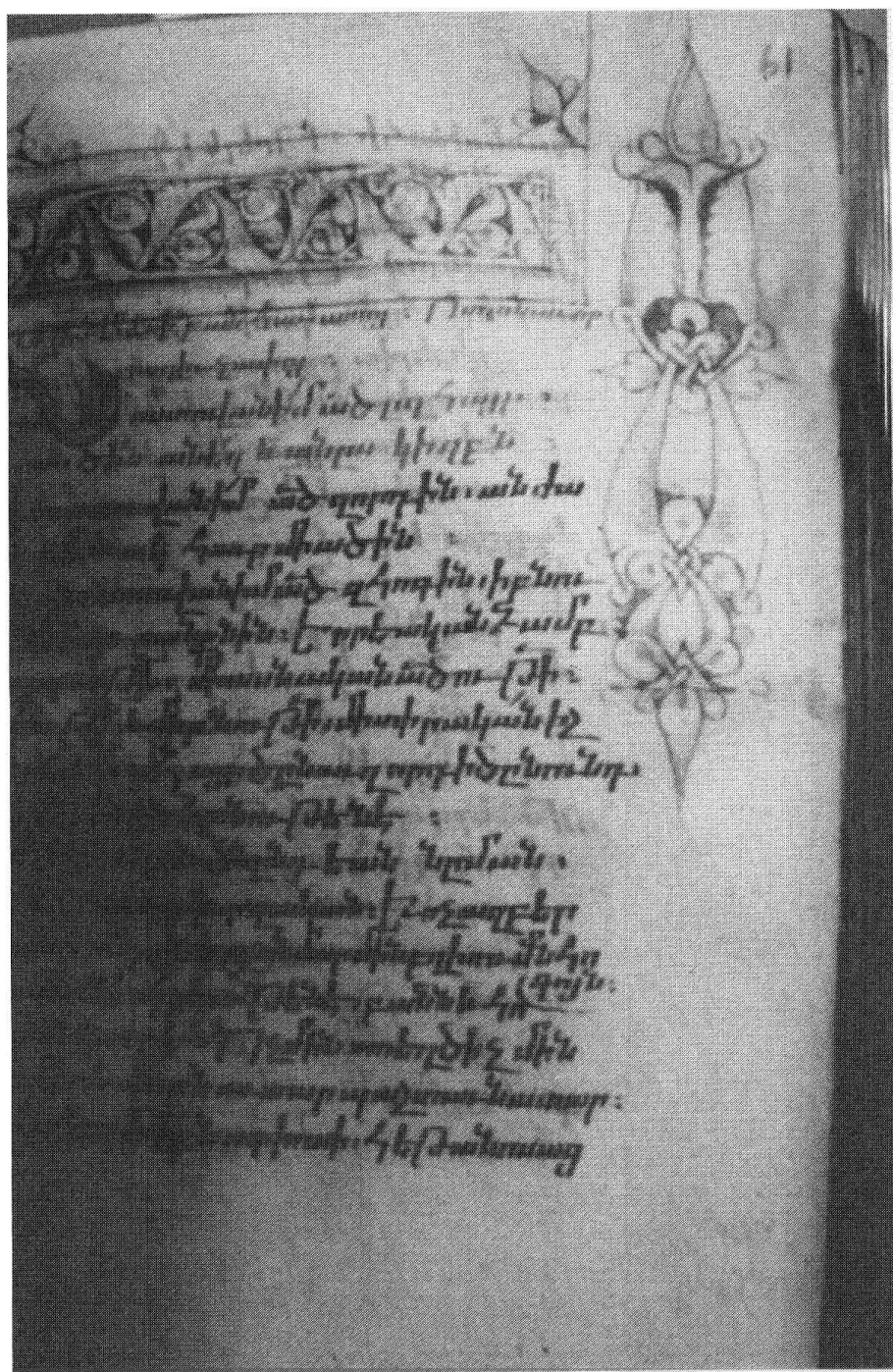


Fig. 5. Headpiece and Marginal Ornament, Ms 123



Fig. 6. Marginal Ornament and Zoomorphic Letter, Ms 123

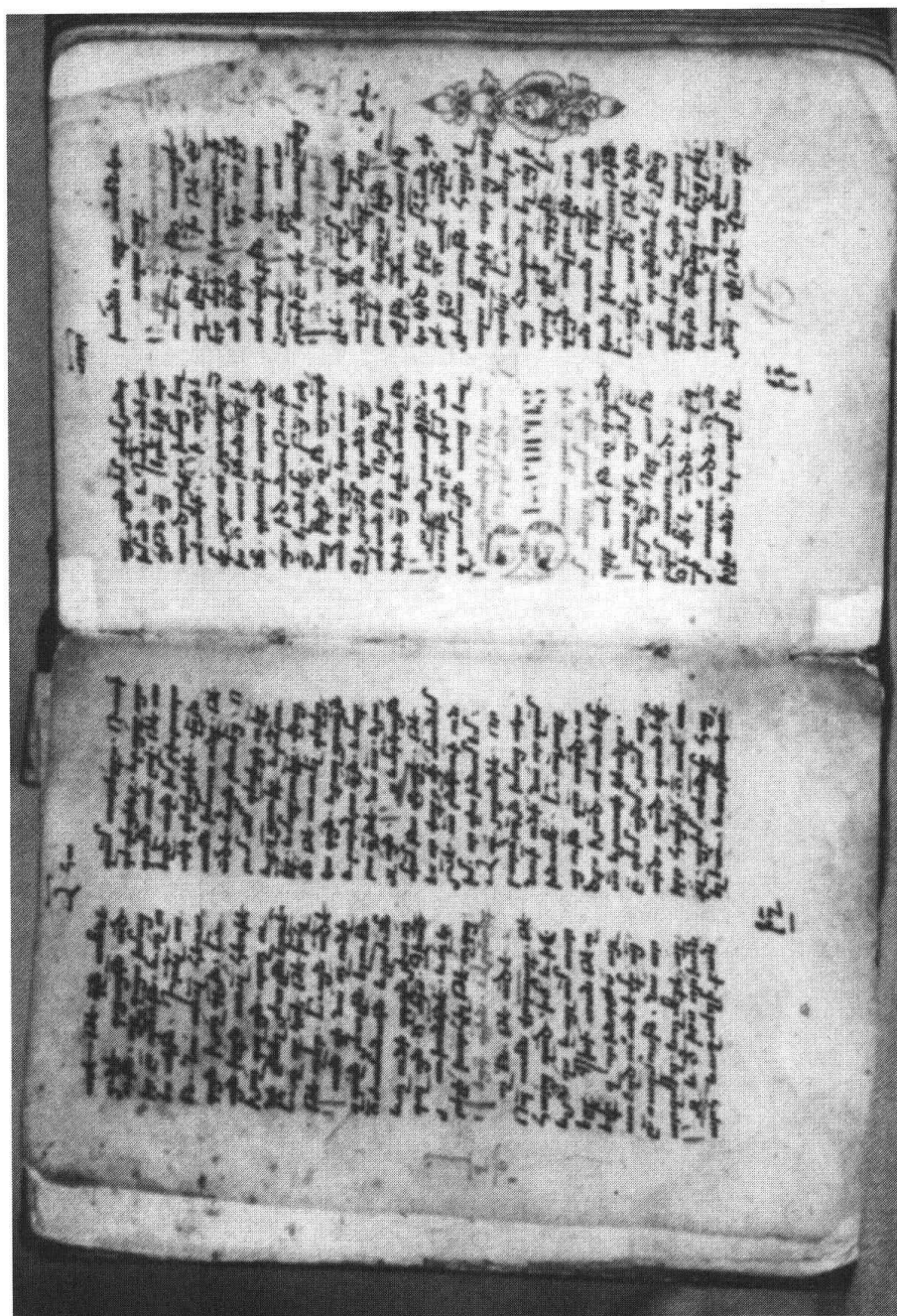


Fig. 7. Text Page with Marginalia, Mekhitarist Monastery, Vienna, Ms 119

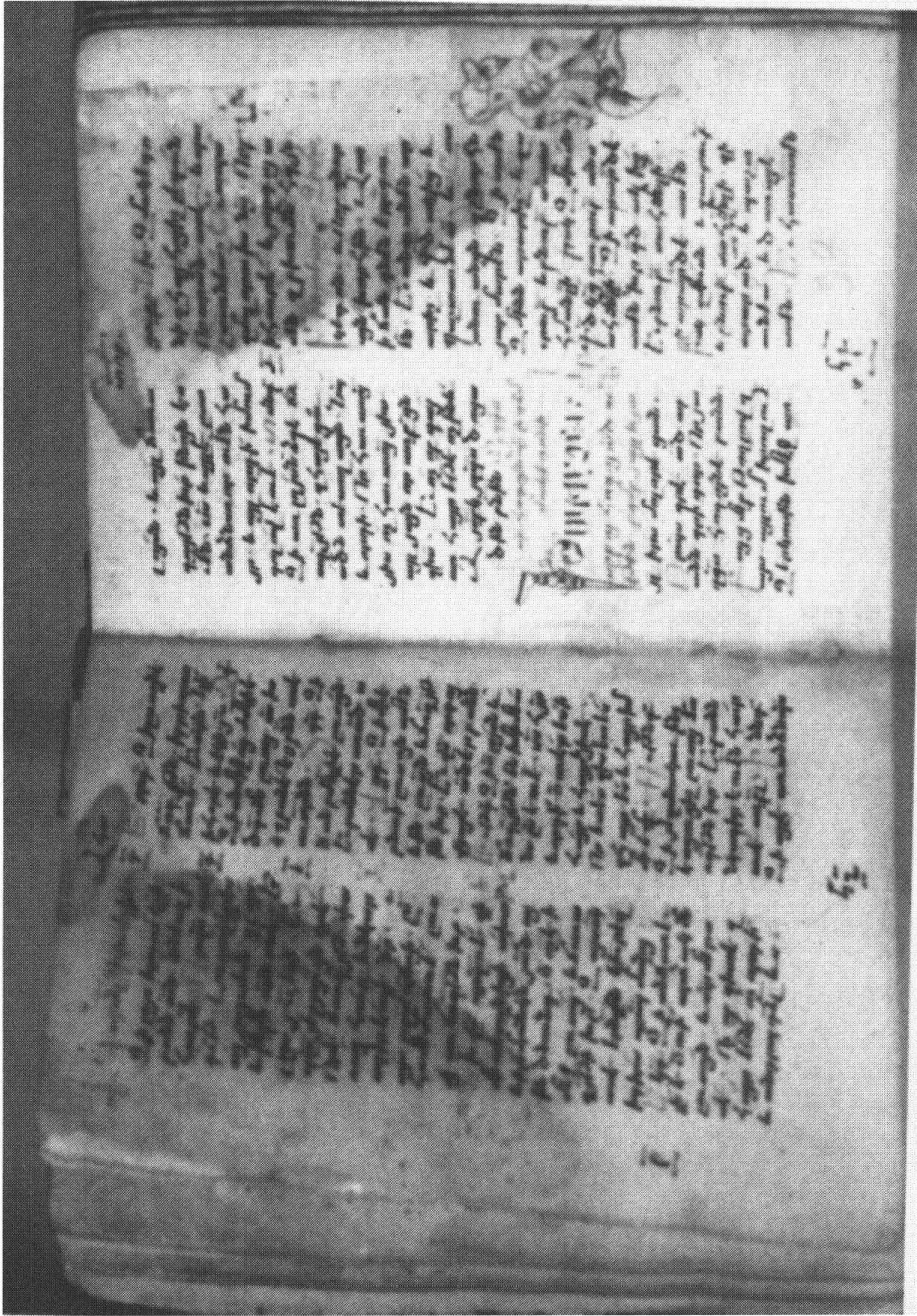


Fig. 8. Text Page with Zoomorphic Ornament, Ms 119

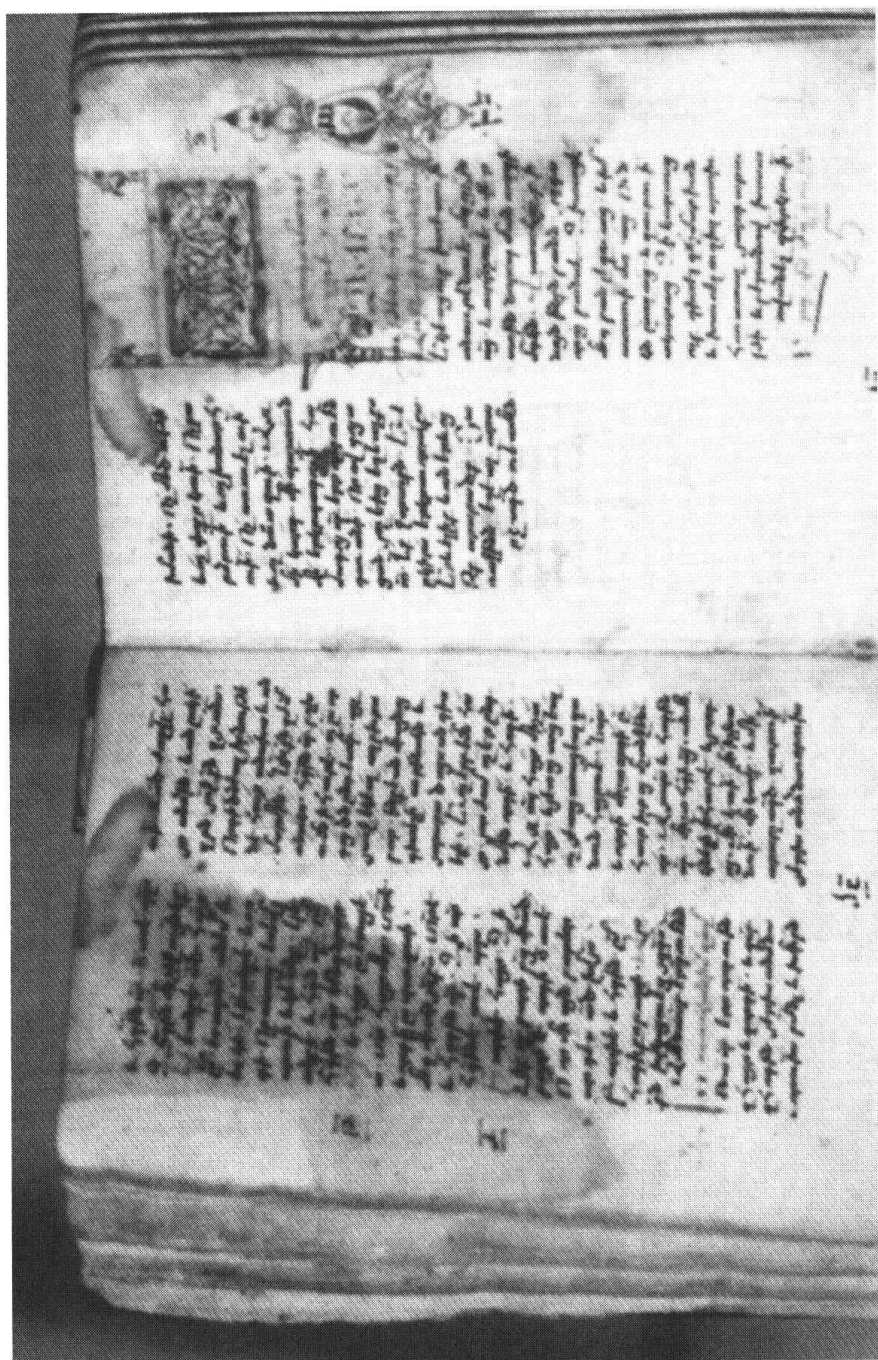


Fig. 9. Bifolio with Marginalia, Ms 119

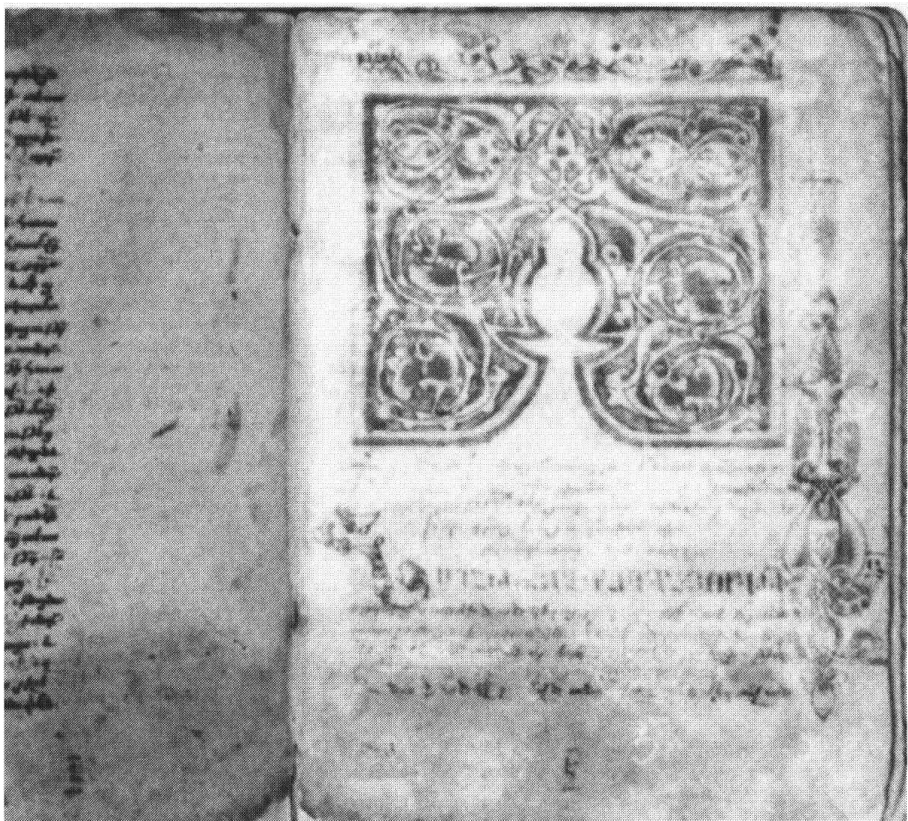
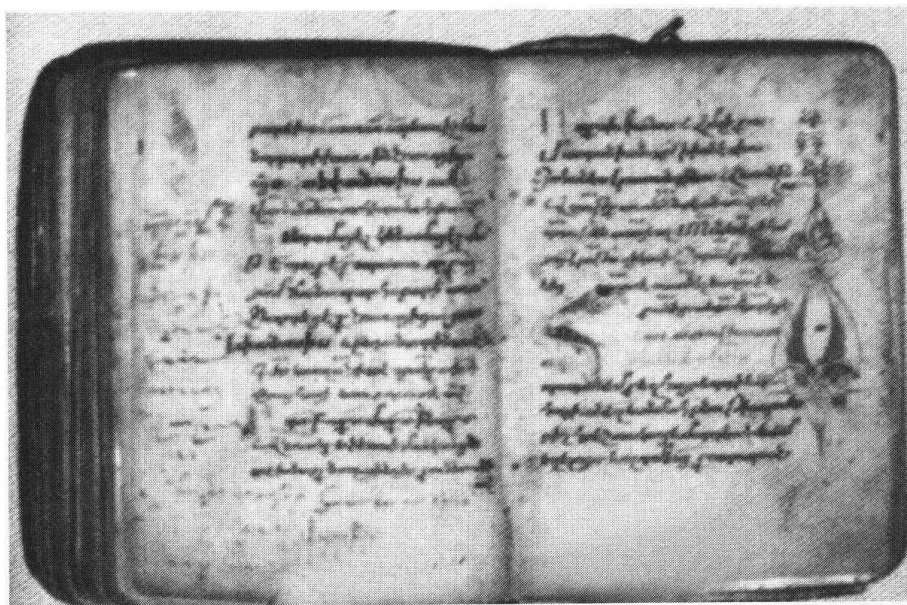
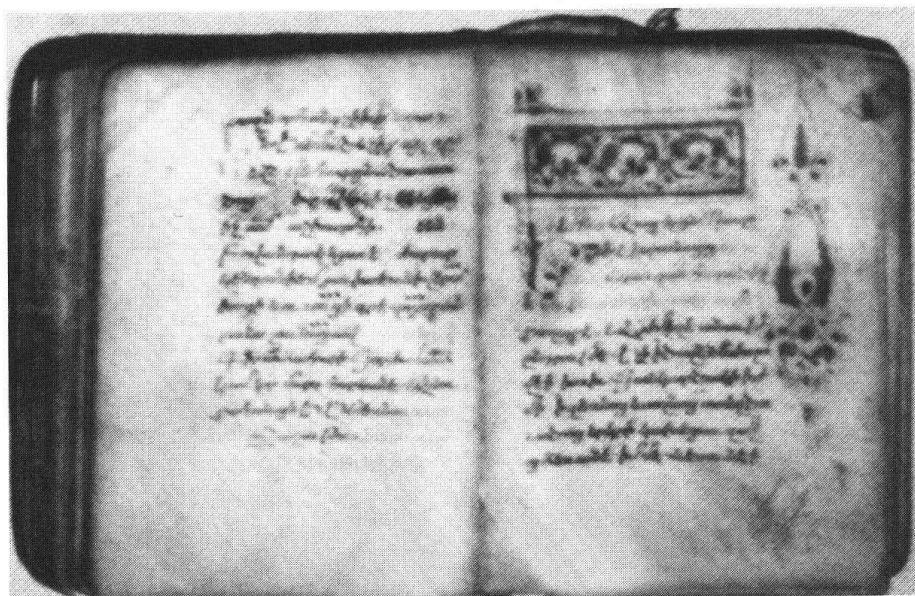


Fig. 10. Headpiece, Ms 119



Figs. 11-12. Bifolio with Headpiece and Marginal Ornament,
Vienna, Ms 431



Fig. 13. Gregory the Illuminator, British Library, Or. 6555



Fig. 14. King Trdat, Ms Or. 6555



Fig. 15. Gregory the Illuminator's Vision, Ms Or. 6555



Fig. 16. Gregory the Illuminator and an Angel,
Ms Or. 6555

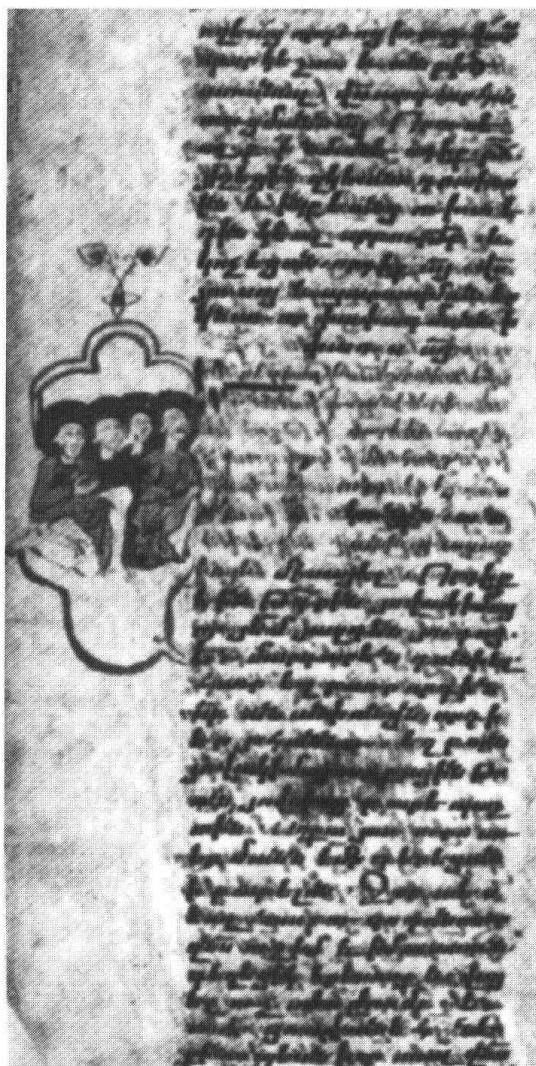


Fig. 17. Marginal Scene of Daniel, Anania, Misayel,
and Azarya, Ms Or. 6555



Fig. 18. Headpiece, Ms Or. 6555